DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 234 542 EC 160 409

TITLE	Parent Helper: Handicapped Children Birth to Five. Communication.
INSTITUTION	Maryland State Dept. of Education, Baltimore. Office of Special Education.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	82
CONTRACT	300-80-0718
NOTE	28p.; With assistance from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Resource Center. For related documents, see ED 222 035 and EC 106 410-411.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Communication Skills; *Developmental Stages; *Disabilities; Expressive Language; Infants; *Language Acquisition; *Parent Role; Receptive Language; Young Children

ABSTRACT

The first of three booklets in a series designed to help parents of handicapped children birth to 5 years old focuses on the communication process. A chart lists developmental milestones for both expressive and receptive language. Learning processes for communication (such as imitation, sensory knowledge, and memory) are reviewed. The bulk of the booklet emphasizes the parent's role in helping the child communicate by creating a responsive environment. Activities are suggested for a variety of principles in developing communication skills, such as reducing frustration, responding to all forms of communication used by the child, and helping the child develop attending, listening, and memory skills. Examples of two young children with handicaps are presented and sample teaching activities for each are provided. (CL)

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PARENT HELPER

HANDICAPPED CHILDREN BIRTH TO FIVE

COMMUNICATION

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Parent Helper

Handicapped Children Birth to Five

COMMUNICATION

Maryland State Department of Education
Division of Special Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
(Phone: (301) 659-2000

1982

SOURCE:

The Maryland State Department of Education:
Resource Manual: Handicapped Children Birth to Five. 1980.

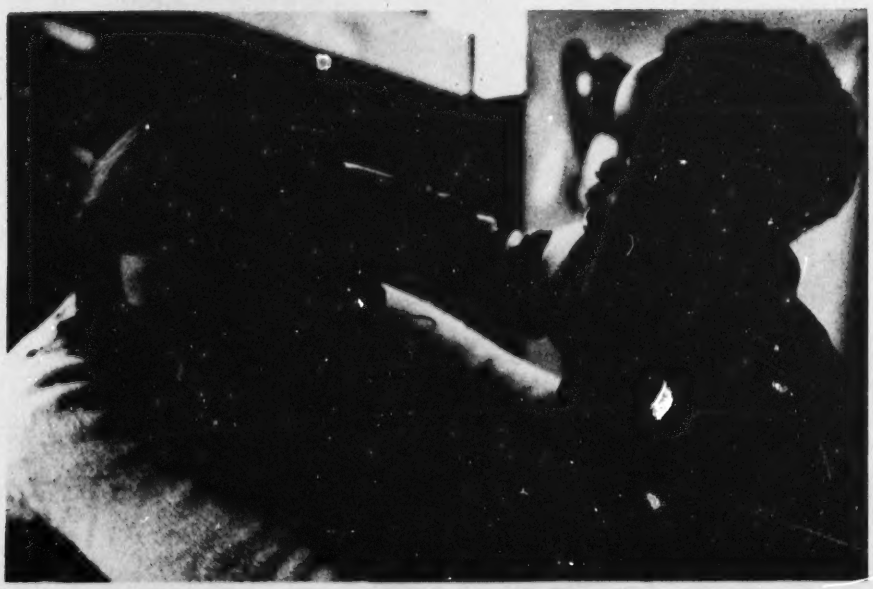
INTRODUCTION

Parents are the most important influence on their child's development of communication and interaction with the world. A child's home environment with the love and nurturing of parents provides a resource rich in opportunities for the development of communication.

A child's ability to communicate may well become one of the most important assets of adulthood. It will enable the child to make sense out of the surrounding world, to relate to others, and to learn.

The intent of this guide as part of the series *Parent Helper: Handicapped Children Birth to Five,* is to present information concerning the communication process, developmental sequences of communicative behaviors, and activities which may help create an atmosphere or climate for meaningful communication between parent and child.

The material in the guide will emphasize that each child and parent are unique individuals. The individualized responses, reactions and parent-child relationships which evolve depend greatly upon the parents' ability to observe and interpret their child's behavior. This guide will attempt to help parents acquire these observational skills.



GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE... THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION

Communication is a very complex process. It is an exchange of words, ideas, and feelings. It involves the ability to receive and express a message through a systematic language code. It can provide an increasingly strong bond of trust and security between a parent and child.

Communication has several component parts. The ability to receive a message and to understand language is part of the communication process known as *receptive language.* Some prerequisites for receptive language development include:

early awareness of sound,
ability to focus attention on sound and human voice,
ability to understand the meaning of spoken words,
ability to remember what is said.

The ability to send a message and to express language is part of the communication process known as *expressive language.* We convey our thoughts, needs, and feelings to others through combinations of facial expressions; body movements, actions and gestures; tone and volume of voice; and speech. Although speech is one important form of expressive language development, it is not the only form of communication.

Communication follows a sequence of development beginning with the very first interactions between parents and their newborn. These early interactions consist of the infant's response to parents' hands, voices, skin, and faces as they touch, hold, and talk to the infant.

The following Developmental Milestone Charts provide a sequence and an age range for communication skill development. Parents may find them helpful in planning appropriate activities for the developmental level of their own child. Since each child is a unique individual, the rate at which each child progresses through these sequences varies greatly.

DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

About 0-3 months

Receptive Language:

Startles in response to loud noise
Smiles in response to familiar voice
Quiets to a familiar voice
Looks directly at the speaker's face
Begins to turn head and eyes toward sound
Anticipates sound associated with feeding
Maintains brief eye contact during feeding

Expressive Language:

Makes soft, throaty sounds
Cries differently to express hunger, irritation, pain
Expresses pleasure by cooing, squealing, gurgling
Produces consonant sounds "g," "k," "h"
Produces vowel sounds "eh," "ah," "uh"
Enjoys taking turns in vocalizing with parents
Smiles in response to his/her mirror image

About 3-6 months

Receptive Language:

Shows fear of angry voice
Smiles and laughs at "pleasant" speech
Turns head toward sound and human voice
Responds to his/her name
Stops crying when talked to

Expressive Language:

Babbles by repeating series of same sounds
Laughs during play
Changes sounds with body positions: "p," "b," "m," and "n"
Makes tongue clicking sounds
Blows "raspberries" through closed lips or tongue movement
Vocalizes with four or more different consonant-vowel syllables ("na," "goo")
Begins to imitate sounds
Makes protest sounds when desired objects are removed
Smiles and waves arms to continue a social exchange

About 6-9 months

Receptive Language:

Looks for family members when asked "Where's Mommy? Daddy?"
Looks at some common objects when named
Responds to his/her name more consistently by stopping activity
Attends somewhat to music
Responds with gestures to such words as "up," "bye-bye"
Appears to "listen" to conversations between others by looking at each speaker
Pauses momentarily in response to "no-no"
Looks at pictures while someone talks about them

Expressive Language:

Imitates familiar gestures (shaking a toy)
Uses 2-syllable babbling ("mama," "dada," "gaga")
Vocalizes to call attention to himself/herself
Babbles using "singing-like" tones, especially to music
Plays speech-gesture games "pat-a-cake," "peek-a-boo"
Uses some gesture language such as shaking head "no"
Often imitates sounds and number of syllables used by others

About 9-12 months

Receptive Language:

Understands some simple requests ("give me, "open your mouth," "give me a kiss")
Understands simple, over-learned words ("hot," "so big")
Responds to simple questions with searching movements ("Where's your shoe? the ball?")
Becomes interested in sounds outside the immediate situation
Responds to music with body movements in rhythmic time to the music

Expressive Language:

Plays exchange games with adults (handing objects back and forth)
Initiates games of "pat-a-cake" and "peek-a-boo"
Uses jargon (strings of a wide variety of consonant-vowel combinations with changes in tone and pitch of voice)
Uses first true word with meaning
Attempts to imitate new words
Imitates cough, tongue clicks
Uses exclamations like "huh"
Uses referential words or sounds ("woo-woo" for dog)
"Converses" with people, toys, mirror using jargon

DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

About 12-18 months

Understands simple one-step commands
Recognizes body parts (hair, eyes, hands, mouth) when named
Understands names of common objects by bringing them from another place upon request
Identifies two or more familiar objects from a group of three-four objects by touching/pointing
Enjoys listening to rhymes and jingles
Begins to look more selectively at pictures to recognize them when named

Expressive Language:

Attempts to get objects by pointing and vocalizing
Uses from 3 to 20 single words meaningfully
Omits final sounds and words frequently
Uses words of more than one syllable ("bottle")
Answers questions "What's this?"
Asks for "more"
Uses two-word combinations as single words ("gimmie," "c'mere")
Imitates many new words
Communicates primarily through true words and gestures

About 18-24 months

Recognizes body parts and clothing articles in large pictures
Understands simple yes/no questions
Understands differences in personal pronouns ("me," "you")
Follows a series of two-three simple related commands with the same object
Appears to listen to meaning of language, not merely words
Recognizes many common objects and pictures as they are named
Understands spatial concepts "in" and "on" by moving his/her body and objects in space

Expressive Language:

Replaces jargon with meaningful words
Imitates animal sounds and other environmental sounds in play
Refers to self by name
Uses "no" frequently
Uses "my" to declare ownership
Begins combining words to form two word phrases ("go bye-bye," "Mommy shoe")
Asks questions by raising pitch of voice at end of word or phrase

DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

About 24-36 months

Receptive Language:

Understands actions in pictures
Recognizes names of smaller body parts (chin, knee, elbow)
Understands functions of objects "Which one do we comb our hair with? drink out of?"
Understands size concept "big," "little"
Understands quantity concepts "one," "more," "all"
Understands spatial concepts "in," "on," "under"
Becomes aware of a sequence and organization for daily routines (mealtime, bathtime, bedtime)
Understands question forms "who?" "where?" "what . . . doing?"
Understands genders boy/girl
Likes to listen to short stories

Expressive Language:

Combines words to express:
possession - "my coat"
recurrence - "more juice"
action - "go outside"
location - "want up"
negation - "no eat"
Usually uses two-four word combinations
Asks for help with personal needs (toileting, washing hands)
Names and talks with his/her drawing
Can say first and last name when asked
Can repeat two numbers in sequence
Talks about an event that has just happened
Uses many commands ("go get it")
Uses "here," "there" as adverbs
Begins using "is" verb form
Uses pronouns "I," "me," "mine," "you"
Has mastered production of early developmental sounds /p/, /b/, /m/, /n/, /h/, /w/, /t/, /d/
Speech is understood by others 70-80 percent of the time

About 36-48 months

Receptive Language:

Understands concepts hard/soft, rough/smooth
Understands spatial concepts front/back
Understands question forms "What do you do when you're hungry? sleepy? cold?"
Follows two-step directions involving two different actions

Expressive Language:

Asks many "who?" "what?" "where?" "why?" questions
Uses four-five word sentences most of the time
Engages in detailed conversations
Uses language in imaginative play
Imitates whispering
Relates two events in correct sequential order
Completes simple verbal opposites ("Daddy is a man; Mommy is a _____.")
Uses verb forms "is," "am," "are"
Uses contracted forms "won't," "can't"
Uses regular past tense ("walk*ed*")
Uses regular plural forms consistently ("block*s*")
Uses pronoun "myself" for emphasis
Uses possessives ("Mommy*'s* car")
Uses prepositions "in," "on," "under"
Uses "and" as a connective word
Begins using "because" as an explanation

DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

About 48-60 months

Receptive Language:

Follows series of three unrelated commands
Identifies two-three primary colors
Understands concepts heavy/light, loud/soft, day/night
Understands directional concepts above/below, top/bottom
Understands variety of question forms ("where?" "when?" "how?")

Expressive Language:

Combines four-eight words in sentences
Describes objects according to size, shape, color
Enjoys re-telling stories
Enjoys asking meaning of new words
Uses "could" and "would" verb forms
Uses future tense verb forms ("will")
Uses "no" and "not" appropriately
Uses contracted negatives ("can't," "don't")
Regularly uses pronouns "he," "she," "they" and possessive pronouns "his," "her," "our," "their"
Uses "if" and "so" in forming complex sentences
Uses most consonant sounds consistently and accurately, although has not mastered them in all words

About 60 + months

Receptive Language:

Identifies all primary colors
Understands concepts same/different
Understands concepts first/middle/last
Understands spatial concepts left/right
Understands more time-related concepts (before/after, yesterday/tomorrow)
Understands question forms "what happens if . . . ?"
Understands question forms "how often?" "how long?"

Expressive Language:

Retells a brief story
Asks meaning of abstract words
Can tell home address
Talks about events in the future using "will"
Uses pronouns "himself," "herself"
Compares objects using "-er" and "-est" endings ("bigger," "biggest")
May distort or substitute for speech sounds /s/, /z/, /r/, /th/ and consonant blends /pl/, /tr/, /sp/, etc.

LEARNING.....THE DISCOVERY PROCESS

How does your child learn to communicate?

- **BY USING HIS/HER SENSES.** Your young child learns about people and objects by listening to the sounds they make; looking at their appearance; and exploring them through touch, smell, and taste. If a child's sense of hearing, sight, or touch is impaired as an avenue for learning, communication and interaction skills may be delayed.
- **BY FOCUSING HIS/HER ATTENTION.** Looking at people and objects or listening to sounds requires certain kinds of attending skills. These include a child's ability to establish eye contact and focus attention on a particular person, object, or sound without becoming distracted by other sights and sounds. Maintaining this kind of attention is important in learning the meaning of language and in interacting with others.
- **BY ATTACHING MEANING TO WORDS.** For effective communication, your young child needs the *sense* of *hearing* and the *ability* to *listen;* the *sense* of *sight* and the *ability* to *look;* the *sense* of *touch* and the *ability* to *feel.* Your young child especially needs to learn that spoken words are merely symbols which represent what is heard, seen, and felt. Words have meaning which your child must learn to understand.
- **BY REMEMBERING INFORMATION.** Your young child's memory is important to store the information he/she has learned about the world through his/her senses. This ability to remember information is important in both the understanding and expression of language.
- **BY IMITATING OTHERS.** Your young child observes the actions of and listens to others. By imitating actions, sounds, and words, your child is learning to express language. This kind of imitation is important for your child to learn new skills and to eventually express language spontaneously.
- **BY USING A COMBINATION OF FACIAL EXPRESSIONS, GESTURES, AND WORDS.** Just as your young child learns about the world through a *combination* of senses, he/she communicates and interacts with the world through a *combination* of facial expressions, body movements, tone of voice, and words. This combination or language system becomes his/her personal way of reaching out to others to express an emotion or idea.

This discovery process may, however, be interrupted or altered as children learn to communicate. For example, early detection of a hearing loss can be critical to your child's ability to communicate effectively. If your baby does not appear to demonstrate an awareness of sound as described in the birth through nine months developmental milestones, your pediatrician should be informed of your observations. A delay in the development of expressive language may also be

observable if your baby stops vocalizing and babbling because there is no reinforcement by hearing his/her own voice.

Hearing (audiological) testing administered by a professional audiologist is possible during these early months of life. The medical and educational professionals working with you and your child can advise you of the local facilities available and the nature of the hearing testing to be administered. Your partnership with them can be available in your continuing observation of your child's responses to sound until formal hearing testing is possible.

Early detection of oral-motor problems (i.e., difficulty controlling movements of the jaw, tongue, and lips) is also critical to your child's ability to communicate effectively. If your child has difficulty closing his/her lips, moving his/her tongue to chew food, swallowing, and coordinating jaw-lip-tongue movements necessary for speech, sound imitation, babbling, and jargoning may not emerge at the expected age levels. Your partnership with professionals working with your child can be valuable in learning methods of jaw control and feeding techniques. These will enable your child to develop better control of mouth movements for the imitation of sounds and words.

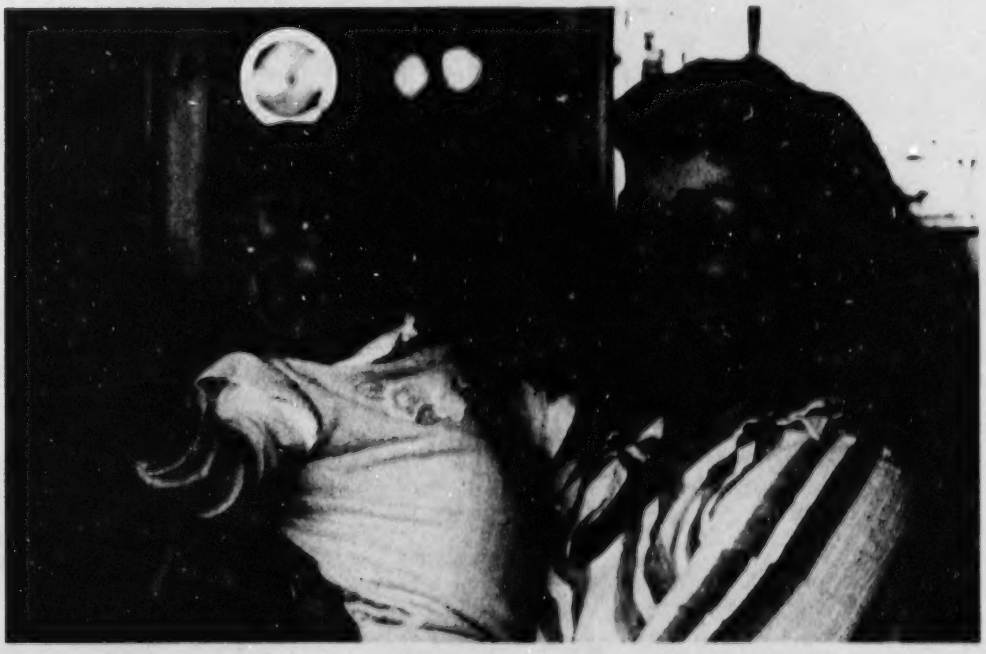
We must be aware that some profoundly involved children may never have the oral-motor control necessary to speak clearly in words and sentences. For them, speech may never be a functional tool for communication. Parents and professionals are continually learning about new techniques and communication devices which can assist children in their desire to communicate when speech is not a realistic expectation for them. It is hoped that parents can become comfortable to explore the use of supplementary systems such as communication boards, manual sign language, and electronic devices. Such systems enable a child to communicate a need, feeling, or idea by touching pictures or words or by gesturing a sign which represents a spoken word.

What can you do to help your child?

- **CREATE AN ATMOSPHERE OR CLIMATE FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION.** Your child needs feelings of security and predictability. Try to provide some structure, routine, and limits in your child's life. Communicate an acceptance of your child by using *genuine* words of encouragement. Create a positive atmosphere that responds to your child's actions and needs as well as stimulates him/her to explore and learn. Try to keep communication stress low.

- **GET YOUR CHILD'S ATTENTION.** Before giving directions or explanations to your child, make certain that he/she is looking at you and is ready to receive your message. Use simple words with special emphasis such as calling his/her name or saying "listen," "look," or "ready."
- **HELP YOUR CHILD UNDERSTAND LANGUAGE.** Try communicating at your child's eye level. Use language that is appropriate for your child's developmental level. Speak clearly, using short, simple sentences. Be specific, using the names or labels for objects. Repeat, repeat, repeat! Use actions or gestures as cues for understanding if your child does not attach meaning to words. Build in success by physically guiding your child step-by-step through the desired behavior if he/she appears frustrated by your request.
- **MAKE YOUR TALKING RELEVANT TO THE SITUATION.** Talk about the here and now. Talk about the obvious—what you and your child are doing, hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting. Children tend to listen more to language that is obvious, meaningful, and interesting to them. Talk *with,* not *at,* your child.
- **GIVE YOUR CHILD TIME TO RESPOND.** Children with delayed language development sometimes require more time to understand, recall information, and express their thoughts. This time period may be difficult for parents who are eagerly awaiting a response.

- **LISTEN TO YOUR CHILD'S MESSAGE.** Maintain eye contact as your child communicates. Let your face and voice convey that you are interested. Listen to your child's tone of voice; watch his/her face, body, and hand movements. A combination of all these behaviors communicates a message.
- **MODEL AND EXPAND YOUR CHILD'S LANGUAGE.** When your child is able to express thoughts with spoken words, repeat the words in a phrase or short sentence to expand the response. Model a new combination of words or a sentence that relates to what your child has already said. This demonstrates a new idea and new language structure.
- **REWARD YOUR CHILD'S ATTEMPTS TO COMMUNICATE.** Your child's desire to communicate may depend, in part, upon the kind of feedback he/she receives from you. Your smiles, hugs, and words of genuine praise can encourage your child to interact and teach him/her the rewards of communication.
- **BECOME A GOOD OBSERVER OF YOUR CHILD'S ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE.** Observe *how* your child communicates his/her needs and *when* your child interacts with others. Describe the situations or activities which seem to stimulate your child's communication. Practice writing down a word or sentence you have heard your child use in exactly the same way your child used it. Use your observations to become more aware of your child's communication developmental level so that helping him/her acquire new skills can be successful and rewarding for both of you.



HOME..... YOUR CHILD'S FIRST LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Since your child's first learning environment is the home, you will want to make it a caring and stimulating place—one that is responsive to your child's needs and interests. The following ideas and activities are suggestions which may be helpful in creating this kind of responsive learning environment. Your child has a unique set of personality traits, needs, and learning strengths. Remember to discuss the appropriateness of these activities for your child with those professionals who are working with you and your child.

WHEN YOUR CHILD IS LEARNING TO UNDERSTAND LANGUAGE...

Provide opportunities to become aware of sound.

- Use different brightly colored sound makers of various (high and low) tones. Rattles, bells, squeaky toys are appropriate. Hold the sound-makers close to your baby at ear level.
- Talk to your baby using facial expressions, tone of voice and words as you hold, bathe, and feed him/her.

Observe your child's response to sounds and voice.

- Does your child look toward you as you talk to him/her during feeding or bath times?
- Does your child search for you with eye or head movement as he/she hears your voice when you enter the room?
- Does your child smile and watch your face as you walk and sing to him/her while holding or rocking?
- Does your child turn his/her head or move his/her eyes when sound-makers are presented to his/her right or left side at ear level?

Allow your child to experience new sounds which he/she can make with an object	• Tie colored yarn with a bell securely attached to it around your child's wrist or ankle so that his/her movements can produce a sound. This is especially helpful for the visually-impaired child. • Clap your child's hands together. • Place your child on his/her stomach, allowing him/her to scratch the rug with fingers. • Bang pots and pans with spoons. • Listen to a clock ticking, water running, a light switch clicking on and off, paper tearing, or the sounds of wind and rain.
Help your child understand the meaning of words.	• Say "come up!" with your arms lifted upward after changing a child's diaper, going outside, after feeding, after awakening from a nap. Tap his/her arms, lifting them upward so that he/she learns how to respond. Pick your child up quickly to reward him/her. • Say "wave bye-bye" as you move your child's arms when someone is leaving. Wave at toys which are the child's favorites as you are putting them away. Any arm, wrist, or finger movement should be praised. (Many children will begin by waving to themselves as they see others wave to them.) Eventually, your child will respond to your request automatically without your physical assistance as a cue.
Provide opportunities to explore books and pictures.	• Choose books which have the following characteristics: .. brightly colored .. one subject per page .. easy-to-turn pages .. squeaky with animal sounds .. textured which child can rub, pull or touch .. real photographs of objects/people .. real photographs of family members • Position your child in your lap so that your face and the book can be seen at the same time. You may also "read" aloud while your child is in the high chair, positioning yourself in front of the chair. • Use short, simple sentences to describe pictures and allow your child to pat or touch the picture. Example: "Look at the ball! Pretty ball! You have a ball."

WHEN YOUR CHILD IS LEARNING TO UNDERSTAND LANGUAGE...

Help your child understand names of familiar objects.

- Ask for "shoe" and "sock" while dressing your child.
- Ask for "spoon" and "cup" after eating.
- Ask for "baby doll" and "blanket" before you go outside.
- Use objects that are meaningful to the situation. As soon as your child looks at the correct object, give praise immediately. When your child makes an incorrect choice, remove the object from his/her hand and name the object. Ask for the desired object again and guide your child's hand toward it. Build in success!

Help your child become aware of his/her body and senses of touch, sight, hearing, taste and smell.

- Begin with body parts that are easily seen and used most often.
- Name the body part with emphasis when your child is using that part in some way during play.
- Label body parts as you are feeding your child.
- Sing simple songs about body parts.
- Hide parts of your child's body under a blanket or under sand on the beach.
- Use baby dolls that have realistic, distinct features:

  "Let's brush the baby's *hair.*
  Let's brush the baby's *teeth.*
  Let's clap the baby's *hands.*
  Let's powder the baby's *tummy.*
  Let's put a band-aid on the baby's *finger.*"

Enrich your child's understanding of language by using action words and descriptive words.	• Talk about what you are doing, repeating the action word several times. Example: "Daddy is brushing your hair. Brush! Brush!" • Read books together. Imitate actions illustrated in the book. Ask your child to imitate. Examples: Pretend to eat the cookies and drink the milk. • Use words to describe familiar objects in daily routine. Examples: "Don't touch! The stove is *hot*!" "That's funny!" (After laughing at some event.) "Daddy's shoes are too *big* for you!"
Provide opportunities for your child to explore objects according to how they are used.	• Explain *why* we do things. Bath-time: "Your hands are so *dirty*! Let's *wash* them!" Mealtime: "You must be *hungry*! Let's *eat* some cereal!" Dressing: "Ooh, it's *cold*! Let's put your *coat* on!" Puzzletime: "The boy has to *see* where he's going. Where are his *eyes*?"
Help your child develop attending, listening, and memory skills.	• Make up stories about magazine pictures together. • Read picture stories together such as "The Three Bears," "Three Little Pigs," or "Sesame Street." • Listen to records which tell a story using clear, distinct speech and sound effects to keep children's attention. • Cut out three - four pictures of animals, people, and objects which could illustrate a short story. Place them on the floor or on a felt board in front of your child. He/she can learn the sequence of the pictures in the order they are presented in the story. • Try to make story-telling times "together-times" with as few distractions as possible.
Encourage your child to use his/her voice to make sounds.	• Make quiet, "cooing" sounds to your child in the crib. • Place your child's hands gently on your face as you speak. • Sing while holding or rocking your child. Look at your child and wait for him/her to vocalize.

WHEN YOUR CHILD IS LEARNING TO UNDERSTAND LANGUAGE...

Help your child discover his/her voice, lip, tongue, and jaw movements.

- Respond with pleasure to your child's sounds by smiling and imitating his/her own sounds.
- Try not to interrupt your child's strings of babbling sounds; he/she will probably stop to listen to you!
- Encourage your child to imitate your babbling by making the sounds you have *already heard him/her make* in vocal play.
- Tape record or try to write the sounds and sound combinations you have heard your child make. These are helpful observations for you and those people working with your child.

Continue to help your child enjoy his/her social interaction with you.

- Play "peek-a-boo!" Respond with excitement as your child's head reappears from under his/her shirt while you are dressing him/her.
- Play "peek-a-boo" with a washcloth during bath time.
- Use a very soft diaper to cover your child's face while playing "peek-a-boo." Help him/her remove the cloth as you say: "Where's (child's *name*)? There's (child's *name*)!" Laugh and smile so that the activity does not seem frightening to your child.
- Play "peek-a-boo" by covering your eyes with your hands. Place your child's hands over his/her eyes with your hands on top.

Help your child learn to imitate gestures.

- Observe your child's behavior with toys, such as banging or shaking. Imitate this behavior first and observe any attempt to imitate you. Take your child's hand and help him/her imitate.
- Choose new gestures which are similar to ones your child already knows. If he/she can pat the table, model the behavior of patting the floor as you say: "Sit down right here."
- Other gestures that develop early in a child's life include:
  waving "bye-bye"
  shaking head "no"
  turning hands over to indicate "all gone"
  moving hands toward body to indicate "come."

Shape your child's sounds into single words.

- Observe the kinds of sounds you have heard your child make. Use those sounds in the beginning of single words meaningful to the situation.

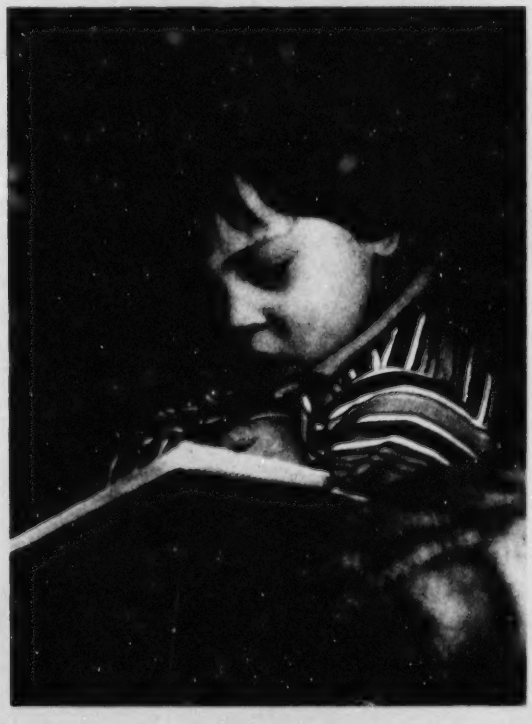
- As your child begins using single words, remember that the word conveys an entire idea. For example:
  "Mama" may mean: "I want Mama,"
  "There's Mama," or "Come here, Mama."
  Listen and respond appropriately. Expand the utterance with:
  "Mama's coming," "You see Mama," or
  "Mama's right here."
- To encourage labeling or naming an object, use the name of that object as a model for your child to imitate. For example:
  "There's your ball! What is that?"
  "I see a cat! What do you see?"

Respond to *all* forms of communication which your child uses.

- Children use sounds and words to attract our attention. They use gestures to add emphasis to their message. This becomes part of their learning the *power* of communication.
- Bend down to your child's level and establish eye contact with him/her. Accept attempts at words, although they may not sound exactly like the real word. Say the word correctly for your child to hear.

Allow your child to imitate a variety of sounds and noises

- Respond to environmental sounds as they occur naturally. Imitate the sounds of trucks, cars, airplanes, and fire trucks. Imitate the sounds of wind on a windy day.
- Create play situations with toys. Pour from a play pitcher, making the sound "ch, ch." Drink from a cup, making lip smacking sounds or "m-m-m."



WHEN YOUR CHILD IS LEARNING TO UNDERSTAND LANGUAGE...

Model two-word phrases for your child to imitate.

- When your child has a vocabulary of 20-30 words, he/she may begin combining some of these words. Take advantage of opportunities to model these combinations in your daily routine. Use combinations of single words which your child already uses. Work from the familiar to the less familiar.
  Examples: "big boy"
  "more juice"
  "my coat"
  "go out"
  "no milk"

Reduce frustration in learning to communicate.

- Children who have difficulty coordinating lip, tongue, and jaw movements required for speech (oral-motor control) may benefit from methods of communication which are less stressful. If receptive language skills include ability to follow simple directions and identify common objects by touching, pointing, or looking in the appropriate direction, an object board can be made for your child to indicate his/her needs. Real objects can be attached to cardboard or plywood to enable your child to look or reach toward a desired toy, eating utensil, or article of clothing. To meet the specific needs of your child, consult with professionals working with your child concerning:
  appropriate objects
  number of objects
  arrangement of the objects on the board
  positioning of the board for each use
  developmental level of your child

Expand your child's ability to form sentences of three-four words.

- Read a picture story using short sentences. Repeat the story over a period of several days until your child begins to tell the story in the same way when seeing the pictures.
- Ask questions about an activity which your child has just completed. Ask *specific* questions about an *immediate* experience. Provide as much information as needed for your child to remember.
  Example: "What did you eat at the party?" provides some structure. "What did you do?" may be too vague for your child to answer and to direct his/her thinking.
  After talking about the main event, then probe for more details which may encourage longer sentences.
  Example: "Tell me about Barbara's new doll house."
- Make up imaginary telephone conversations about some event.

Stimulate use of verb and pronoun forms when your child expresses his/her thoughts consistently at the sentence level.

- Choose a simple nursery rhyme that can be demonstrated through pictures and objects. Choose a rhyme which emphasizes certain verb forms or pronoun forms.
  Example: "Where is Thumbkin?" emphasizes use of the verb "is" in short sentences.
  Example: "I'm a Little Teapot" emphasizes use of pronoun forms "I" and "me."

SAMPLE EXERCISES

You have probably discovered that your child needs some specific time with you for a certain activity each day. However, there are also many opportunities that occur naturally in the daily routine which can promote communication development. The following activities serve as reminders that communication skills can be learned within the daily routine.

DESCRIPTION

Christina is a three-year-old child with a repaired cleft lip and palate. She has had recurring ear infections and has been hospitalized three times for surgical repairs of her palate and placement of tubes in both ears to help control middle ear fluid problems. Christina communicates with two-word phrases and does not yet understand concept of size, number, or function.

SAMPLE TEACHING ACTIVITY

Christina's mother enjoys baking cookies. She has decided that Christina is old enough to help. She takes advantage of the opportunities to help Christina follow directions, learn new action words, and learn to sequence or organize an activity.

"We're going to make cookies. First, let's wash our hands. We need a big bowl—two big spoons—one egg—and the cookie mix."

"Let's pour the cookie mix in the bowl. Now, let's crack the egg. Now, let's stir 'round and 'round. Stir! Stir!"

She also takes advantage of opportunities to encourage expressive language development using new words and two-three word sentences.

"Let's make this cookie for Daddy. Whose cookie is it? It's Daddy's cookie." (Christina imitates.)

Christina's mother makes a small book with stick-figure drawings of Christina making cookies. Christina can tell Dad about her experience by talking about the pictures.

DESCRIPTION

David is a two-year-old child who is not yet talking. He rarely looks at people in his social interactions with them. David's attention span is described as "very short" by his parents. He shows little interest in imitating actions or speech. David's parents have tried to encourage attending and imitation skills by holding him on their laps in front of a mirror. David has shown only a fleeting interest in this activity and usually cries in his plea to escape the situation.

SAMPLE TEACHING ACTIVITY

A small jar of soap bubbles provides an enjoyable play-time activity for David and his parents. They quickly discover that blowing bubbles also provides many valuable learning experiences for David.

David and his father sit on the floor opposite each other. David's father says: "Let's blow bubbles! Look, David!" He positions the bubble-blower to his mouth at a height which "forces" David to look up at his face to see the bubbles. As he exaggerates the shape of his lips to blow, David becomes interested in watching his mouth and tries to imitate the blowing action.

David's father uses many simple directions to stimulate receptive language development:

"Look
Pop the bubbles!
Pop the bubbles with your finger!
Step on the bubble with your foot!
Help Dad blow!
Look up!"

He uses many descriptive words as he talks about the bubbles:

"Here's a big bubble!
Here's a little bubble!
These bubbles are wet!"

He uses single words and gestures repeatedly to encourage expressive language development:

"Wow! Bubbles!
Pop! Pop! Pop!
Do you want more?
Can you tell Dad more?
O.K. More bubbles
Pop! Pop! Pop! (gestures with pointing finger)
Where did the bubbles go?
All gone!" (gestures with hands)

SUMMARY

The information presented in this guide concerning communication development was collected from a variety of sources. Among the most important sources were children who teach us so much about development, motivation, and behavior if we are willing to observe and learn.

This guide has also included the importance of parents and professionals working together in a partnership with a child who has a diagnosed handicapping condition. Together they can explore, plan, and implement an approach which can provide a child with a living tool—the ability to communicate.

This guide was partially funded by the U.S. Education Department, Office of Special Education, under Part C of the Education of Handicapped Act, PL91-230 Title VI, as amended. Technical assistance was provided by the Mid-Atlantic Regional Resource Center through the Office of Special Education contract OEC300-80-0718. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Education Department, and no official endorsement by the U.S. Education Department should be inferred.

With Assistance from the
Mid-Atlantic Regional Resource Center